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ABSTRACT

This information brief explains the Transition Service Integration Model, an approach to integrating service systems at the point of transition for youth with significant disabilities. It explains that the Transition Services Integration Model is designed to combine the resources of school and postschool systems in sharing the costs of a student-driven approach to transition planning during the last year of school, with the intended result of integrated employment with wages paid directly by the employer. The brief reports encouraging results from using this model, which has been piloted in several communities in California. It notes that 72% of students were employed at graduation as compared with 8% prior to model implementation. A case study of the San Francisco Unified School District's use of the model is offered. A table identifies seven features of the Transition Services Integration Model. These include: an organized community-based class of 8 to 10 youth with significant disabilities during their last year of school; employment in integrated settings during this year; non-work activities performed in normalized settings; and adult agency employment specialists working in conjunction with school personnel. (DB)

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NCSET Information Brief

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Addressing Trends and Developments in Secondary Education and Transition

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition

Creating Opportunities for Youth With Disabilities to Achieve Successful Futures

A partnership of —

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Integrating Service Systems at the Point of Transition for Youth with Significant Disabilities: A Model that Works

By Richard G. Luecking and Nicholas J. Certo

It is estimated that 75 percent of adults with significant disabilities and 92 percent of adults with profound disabilities are unemployed (La Plante, Kennedy, Kaye, & Wenger, 1996). For recent school leavers with significant disabilities, less than eight percent are employed or receiving postsecondary education during the first five years after exiting school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). This is not a new problem. Despite the fact that federal policy and legislation have existed for many years, few youth with significant disabilities today exit school with jobs or the support to acquire them. Indeed, there are explicit requirements that address this issue in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA), the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its subsequent amendments, and state developmental disabilities legislation, yet the problem persists.

Given these legislative mandates, public schools, vocational rehabilitation, and developmental disabilities programs need to work together to actively facilitate the transition from school to work and community living for youth with significant disabilities. Through collaborative interagency efforts, programs like supported employment, and the systematic use of assistive technology and job accommodations can be made available to students prior to leaving school. Moreover, working together allows individuals to receive *continued support* to maintain and expand their employment and living outcomes throughout adulthood, in addition to accessing other community services and supports. This brief will (a) outline a model that integrates transition services at the point of school exit, (b) show the impact of such a model on student outcomes, and (c) share implications of the model.

Transition Services Integration Model

The Transition Services Integration Model expands the availability of integrated career, community living, and postsecondary education options for individuals with significant disabilities who are in their last year of public school (i.e., age 20-21). The Transition Services Integration Model is designed to combine the resources of school and postschool systems in sharing the costs of a student-driven approach to transition planning, resulting in integrated employment, with wages paid directly by the employer. During the student's last year in school, the costs of these services for pending graduates are paid by the local school district. However, services are provided within the administrative structure of adult service agencies

and are provided away from the school campus. Staffing is provided by the adult agencies under a contract agreement with the school districts, by assigning school personnel to work directly with and in these agencies.

The staffing ratio, then, is roughly three staff to 8 to 10 students, including the public school teacher, who is responsible for implementing instruction according to the Individualized Educational Program (IEP), and two adult agency staff who assist in the support of the individual students as they pursue their learning and career development objectives. The number of staff and students is ultimately determined by the number of students participating, and by the needs of the students as determined by the IEP. In some cases, the IEP dictates a higher staffing ratio. Once the school system commits to implementing this model, students participate based on their choice and the choice of their family.

In the day-to-day implementation of this model, students spend their time primarily on the job. Ideally, these jobs are developed prior to the start of the final school year, and are in integrated settings with wages paid directly to the student by the employer. Each job is located based on student interest and preferences. When students are not working, they are engaged in individually arranged activities, including shopping, use of generic recreation facilities, auditing community college classes, etc.

In this model, adult service agencies provide services to students with significant disabilities, who are concurrently enrolled in public school but receiving educational services outside of the school building. Ultimately, funding for this model not only comes from the school system, but also the vocational rehabilitation and developmental disabilities systems. At the end of public school responsibility, the latter two systems share the cost of maintaining and expanding work and non-work preferred activities by authorizing the agencies to continue services on the first day of this formal exit.

This approach allows for a seamless transition. The special education services provided by the public schools are continued by adult service agencies after graduation, eliminating the graduate's problem of being confronted with the choice of either a rehabilitation-funded work program or a developmental disabilities-funded program that primarily addresses non-work or simulated work activities. More importantly, it eliminates the possibility that the graduate will have to sit on a waiting list for programs funded by rehabilitation and developmental disabilities systems. The student achieves and maintains postschool employment goals and outcomes cited in the IEP without disruption. Primary features of the model are listed in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Features of the Transition Services Integration Model

- An organized class, completely community based, of 8-10 youth with significant and/or multiple disabilities who are in their last year of school,
- Employment in integrated settings during their last year of school where they are hired directly by the employer,
- Non-work activities performed in normalized settings,
- Individualized schedules and individual choice of employment options,
- Adult agency employment specialists working in conjunction with school personnel,
- Costsharing resources of the school system, state vocational rehabilitation services, and state developmental disabilities agency, and
- An outcome of paid work with postschool support in place *before* school exit.

Encouraging Results

This model has been piloted in select communities in California, including metropolitan San Francisco and San Diego. More recently, it has been implemented in three school districts in Maryland. Data from California demonstrate the model's effectiveness. For instance, in academic year 1997-1998, 33 students in their last year of public school from five school districts participated; 32 students, or 97 percent, were employed at graduation, and 33 students, or 100 percent, transitioned seamlessly to the same adult agency that had worked with them prior to graduation. Similarly, implementation in academic year 1998-1999 resulted in the following: 54 students who were in their last year of public school were served from seven school districts; 44 students, or 81 percent, transitioned seamlessly to the same agency; and 39 students, or 72 percent, were employed at graduation. The average salary was above minimum wage, and the average weekly hours worked was 15.5. The results of this model stand out in stark contrast to the national outcome of *eight percent* employment for this group, as cited earlier.

Solution in practice: A case study

Disruption of services to youth with significant disabilities at the time of school exit was the typical scenario for youth attending San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) before this model was implemented in 1997. With consultation from San Francisco State University, SFUSD entered into an agreement with WorkLink, a local adult employment service provider, to jointly serve youth in their last year of public school.

Working collaboratively, SFUSD assigned a teacher to a class of 10 students while WorkLink supplied two employment specialists in lieu of two instructional assistants that the school district would ordinarily assign the class. Prior to the start of the school year, the WorkLink staff helped the students find jobs suitable to the students' interests and experience. Once the school year began, the teacher and the employment specialists worked together to support the students in their jobs as well as to jointly plan for other non-work community activities that prepared students for adult life, such as using public transportation, using recreational resources, etc.

The state vocational rehabilitation service opened cases for these youth and agreed to reimburse WorkLink for postschool employment service. Likewise, Golden Gate Regional Center, the state agency responsible for funding adult community services for persons with developmental disabilities, agreed to reimburse WorkLink for non-work postschool services. Representatives of these two agencies were involved in regular planning meetings held throughout the school year so that all services for participants were approved and in place upon graduation. As a result, the students continued to be supported in their jobs and other community activities upon school exit, because the employment specialists, employed by WorkLink, were covered by contracts in place with these agencies. For the students, the first day after school exit looked the same as the last day of school–they had the same jobs, the same community activities, and the same staff supporting them.

Here is an example of the impact of the model on three students: Ingrid now works as an accounting department assistant at the Museum of Modern Art, earning $11.60/hour; Sara works as an inventory clerk at Borders Books, earning $7.00/hour; and Danny works at Virgin Records as a stock clerk, earning $7.25/hour. All three held these jobs during their last year of school and have maintained them through the collaboration of systems that have developed complementary funding and service responsibilities.

Implications

Research and practice have consistently shown that youth with significant disabilities experience better postschool employment success when paid work is incorporated into secondary school curriculum and when links between schools and postschool service are in place (Sax & Thoma, 2002). The model described here offers one approach for making this happen for youth who are about to exit their special education programs.

The model requires, however, careful planning among all collaborators. In most locations throughout the country, there are collaborations between schools, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and developmental disabilities programs. However, these collaborative efforts often lack the intensive, direct, and overlapping planning and service delivery as compared to the model described in this brief.

In locations where there is immediate access to adult developmental disabilities services upon school exit, as well as in states that are working to resolve problems associated with service waiting lists, this model offers an important strategy for interagency cost-sharing and collaboration that results in a seamless transition for youth with significant disabilities. Another rationale for an approach integrating these three related systems is the fact that the development of careers for individuals with the most significant disabilities is labor-intensive, and none of these systems have enough funds on their own to adequately staff this important service. Working together, these systems can ensure that employment for youth with significant disabilities is the rule rather than the exception.

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Resources

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